10: d'Orleans--277 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 563, 805 Ethnic subgroups

"The duration of time does not trouble them [LSS: Kha boatmen, in the service of a Laotian] either, they count the days like the Laotians, and their year consists of twelve lunar months of four weeks each, of which one contains eight days, at the end of a few years a month is intercalated. Dates escape them altogether. 'The old people know them,' they reply to our questions."

10: d'Orleans--344 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 527, 805

"April 11th

This is a day of great rejoicing, being the celebration of the Mahason crane paï (the calendar being finished goes away), the change of year being observed here in the fifth month, instead of in the fourth as at Nan. This and the rejoicings in the twelfth month are the two most important of the fêtes held in nearly every week of the year. This fête is very similar to that of the Annamite Têt, except that here it extended over nearly a fortnight."

25: Brodrick--100-101 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 805

"The time slips by, each moon of seven nights, each month of four moons, each year of twelve months, each cycle of twelve [101] years, each era of twelve cycles, and then no more time-count, you begin again at the beginning."

726 of his army, the survivors of which crossed the river by swimming.
643*
175* /67/ The "restoration." -- Victory of Pak Phoun. He halted at Xieng-Khane (1). In the general confusion his second son Thène-

1. To the south of Luang-Prabang, on the right bank of the Mekong, today in Siamese territory.

Kham, a worthy descendant of Fa-Ngoun, did not lose his head. He hastily regrouped the fugitives, armed the inhabitants of the region, reformed a nearly homogeneous army as well as could be expected and, since he knew that the Annamites had been greatly weakened by a dearly bought victory, set out boldly to meet them. The Laotians fought with the strength of despair and defeated the invaders at Pak-Phoun. Exploiting this success, Thène-Kham went in hot pursuit and forced them to recross the Mékong in full disorder at the level of Pak-Nane. Lan-Xang was saved. The generalissimo Phoua-Khouang-Soun had to evacuate Tran-Ninh and died in Annamite territory--it is said that he was struck by lightning in the course of a violent storm.

But these grave events had broken the physical resistance of King Tiakaphat, who died at Xieng-Khane at the age of sixty-five, "the third day of the crescent moon of the fifth month" of year 841 (1479 A. D.) (2), leaving fourteen /68/ legitimate children of which eight

●/805/ 2. The Laotian year is lunar, beginning towards the middle of April. Every three years an extra month is inserted which doubles the eighth month. The numbering of the years is based on a great cycle of sixty years and on two others of ten and eight years. The Laotian era began in 638 A. D. In 1900 it entered the second year of its 22nd cycle and it was then year 1262 (Pi-Xuet-Tho-Sok). Year 841 in which King Tiakaphat died therefore corresponds to 638 + 841 = 1479 of the Christian era.

were sons and six daughters.

THÈNE-KHAM (SOUVANNA-BAN-LANG) (1445), KING 1479-1486.

727 Thène-Kham had actually held the power ever since the death
643* of his elder brother, and the situation was therefore unchanged when
175* he mounted the throne in 1479.

[788
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[169] The formula used in southern Laos is more concise and slightly different.

695 The natives of Laos, whatever their race, have a great respect for any oath and stand in much dread of the consequences of perjury.

Oaths are widely used in courts of law in cases of disputes between individuals. When a judge has reached the end of his arguments and is confronted with a stubborn plaintiff he sends him to the pagoda before the sacred statues to deny the accusation or affirm his statements.

In this case, the above formula is modified in accordance with the needs of the case, as regards the object of the oath and the type of authority invoked as sanction. But the basis is always the same.

As a means of legal procedure, an oath is regarded as an argument of such force and of such grave consequences that it is used only as a last resort. In Laos it is the ultima ratio judicium.

• 805 The Laotian calendar (1). The Laotian year is calculated on the

[792]

(1) Since the bonzes establish the calendar we have thought it well to place this information in the chapter devoted to religion in Laos.

phases of the moon and includes twelve months which are divided into twenty-four half-moons. The months have thirty and twenty-nine days alternately, giving 354 days in the year or eleven days less than in the solar year.

In reality the Laotian calendar is luni-solar, for in order to bring the ordinary year into approximate harmony with the solar year an extra month is inserted every three years after the eighth month, and repeats the latter. It is called the "second eighth month" (Dueune pèt song). In chronological dating, the Laotian year begins about the middle of the fifth month (April).

Like the Siamese, the Laotians have adopted a system for co-ordinating and numbering their years which is based on a great cycle of sixty years and two other intermediate cycles of ten and twelve years each. The first of these intermediate cycles is decimal, and the second is zodiacal (duodecimal).

[170] Each year is designated first by the name of the great cycle, then by those of each of the intermediate cycles and by a chronological number.

149: Reinach--128 G-8 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

[198]
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The terms used to designate the years of these various cycles are taken from the Pali language and other sacred idioms of India.

1. In northern Laos the years of the cycles have the following names:

TEN YEAR CYCLE	TWELVE YEAR CYCLE
Kate-Sok.	Pi-Tkiaî.
Kaute-Sok.	Pi-Pao.
Oûane-Sok.	Pi-Gui.
Tao-Sok.	Pi-Maô.
Kâ-Sok.	Pi-Si.
Kab-Sok.	Pi-Saî.
Hab-Sok.	Pi-Sagnâ.
Ouet-Sok.	Pi-Mote.
Mûng-Sok.	Pi-Sane.
Peûk-Sok.	Pi-Hao.
	Pi-Sète.
	Pi-Kaî.

2. In southern Laos and Siam the years of the cycles have the following names:

TEN YEAR CYCLE	TWELVE YEAR CYCLE
Eka-Sok.	Pi-Xuèt (of the rat).
Thô-Sok.	Pi-Xalu (of the ox).
Tri-Sok.	Pi-Khane (of the tiger).
Tiattava-Sok.	Pi-Thô (of the hare).
Bentia-Sok.	Pi-Marong (of the great dragon).
Xô-Sok.	Pi-Maseng (of the small dragon).
Sattha-Sok.	Pi-Mamia (of the horse).
Attha-Sok.	Pi-Mamè (of the goat).
Nophâ-Sok.	Pi-Vok (of the monkey).
Thatsa-Sok.	Pi-Raka (of the cock).
	Pi-Tio (of the dog).
	Pi-Koun (of the pig).

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[171] The Laotian era began in 638 A.D. In 1900 it is entering the second year of its twenty-second sixty-year cycle. It is numbered 1262, and called Kaute-Pi-Tkiaî or Pi-Xuèt-Tho-Sok. Since the series of years in the ten-year cycle becomes exhausted before that of the twelve-year cycle, the sign Kate or Eka of the first is added to the sign Sète or Pi-Tio of the second in order to provide a name for the eleventh year which begins a new ten-year period. This combining of names continues thus for a period of sixty years, at the end of which the first two signs of each cycle once more occur together.

Laotian holidays. Laotian holidays are at once religious and civil. Fairly numerous, since there are ten of them each year, they all begin with ceremonies in the pagodas, and in almost all localities the bonzes are the organizers, the impresarios, the decorators and the artificers.

The chronological year begins in the fifth month (March or April). Here are the names and a description of the holidays which succeed one another almost every month, and the first of which in date is that of aspersion or of the new year, lasting seven days.

"The first day of this series of holidays may rather be described as a day of purification. Early in the morning the streets of Luang-Prabang fill with people in holiday dress who go to the market to buy live animals, especially fish and birds. Towards four in the afternoon they go to the little islands which the low water has left uncovered in the middle of the river and set free the animals purchased that morning by plunging them once again in their respective elements, the fish in the water and the birds in the air. The purpose of this touching custom is to obtain pardon for sins committed during the year which is drawing to a close. In the evening the bonzes are invited to come and pray in private homes. They are presented with cooked rice, fruit, cakes, flowers and wax candles.

"During the six days which follow everyone is in a joyous state. People exchange visits and good wishes, and attach cords of cotton to form bracelets to one another's wrists as good luck pieces.

"The statues of Buddha are not forgotten. Cotton strings, usually adorned with strings of flowers, are also attached to them.

"In each pagoda the statues of Buddha are taken down from the altar and placed on the squares before the pagodas in niches forming low kiosks, where all the [172] faithful come and sprinkle them with

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perfumed water in the hope of being cured of the ills from which they suffer. In the course of the day water is sprinkled now on the bonzes, who go forth in palanquins to pay each other visits, and now on the King, the great men and the native officials, who pass back and forth through the city for two days running, some on elephant back and the others in sedan chairs.

"Although the water used in sprinkling the bonzes and the King is generally clean and perfumed, the same cannot always be said of the water used to sprinkle the kingdom's great men and officials. Every day until four in the afternoon, the young girls try to douse the young men who pass by and to smear their faces black. The young men do not sprinkle the girls, but may try to smear them with black too.

"After four in the afternoon the people get flowers and use them to decorate the pagodas. In the evening, inside the pagodas which are empty of their Buddhas, young men and women meet around the altar and Ngan (celebration) take place each day until such time as the statue of Buddha resumes its place in the sanctuary.

"On the morning of the fourth day all the officials of the Laotian administration who have been able to come to Luang-Prabang visit the King in ceremonial dress to offer him their best wishes for the new year. After an invocation the grand master of ceremonies presents the wishes of all those present, with candles lit and flowers which each person has brought all around. Again in the name of all those present, the grand master respectfully places the traditional cotton threads around the royal wrists. Then the members of the audience come up one after the other to kneel before the king, offer him their little bouquets flanked by wax candles and touch the outstretched hand of the monarch with their inclined foreheads. This is a most picturesque manner of hand-kissing and paying homage (1).

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(1) The administration of the "little oath" or oath of the fifth month takes place during this celebration.

"Holiday of the eighth month (July). This is the entry of the bonzes into retreat (this holiday corresponds to our meat days preceding Lent).

"Each year, from the eighth to the eleventh month, the bonzes are not allowed to sleep outside the pagoda to which they are

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attached, and they are supposed to increase their prayers and pious exercises. At the beginning of this period, and until eleven in the morning on the first day, the inhabitants come and provide celebrations for the bonzes and offer them meals accompanied with music.

"Holiday of the ninth month (feast of waters and pirogue races).

"The purpose of this holiday, which falls in the very middle of the rainy season (August), is to obtain abundant rainfall from heaven. In the morning there is a great market which everyone attends in his best clothes, and in the afternoon there are races on the Mékong by the so-called racing pirogues.

[173] "Holiday of the tenth month (feast of cakes, or rather feast of the dead, September).

"In the morning of this day the inhabitants take little packages to their respective pagodas. A label is attached to each package with a small bamboo pin, and the label bears the name of a dead relative. Each package contains cakes and is destined for an ancestor or relative who has died recently. The packages are delivered to the bonzes, who recite prayers for the dead persons and eventually eat the cakes themselves.

"Holiday of the eleventh month (October, end of the bonzes' retreat, reminiscent of our Easter celebrations).

"The pagodas are lit up, and fireworks exploded. Private houses are also brightly lit.

"The inhabitants make bamboo rafts on which they place various foods, in the midst of bright lights. Great numbers of these illuminated rafts are then loosed in the current of a watercourse. The fiery fleets drifting downstream remind one of Venetian feast days with their lighted gondolas.

"Holiday of the twelfth month (November, feast of harvest and feast of waters).

"The harvest is over, and the dry season well established. This is the last in date of the year's public holidays, and also the most brilliant.

"A pirogue race takes place at this time, and also another ceremony of oath-taking (called the "great oath") at which all the officials of all the grades of the Laotian administration must be present.

"The holiday of Thiout-Bang-Fai, or feast of rockets, occurs on this date in all the agricultural centers and regions of Laos"(1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier

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(Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

Besides these major holidays there are a certain number of others which are more religious than secular in character and which fall in between the ones dealt with above.

In the course of the sixth month (April-May), for example, a religious holiday is celebrated in memory of the first leaders of the Buddhist religion.

At the end of the eleventh month, on a date which is fixed in accordance with the rites and which varies from one year to another, a celebration takes place in the pagodas in honor of the men who first introduced Buddhism into Indo-China.

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Finally, after the twelfth month (November or December), comes the feast of penitence which applies to all the faithful. During a [174] kind of Lent which lasts for nine days, true believers must abstain from certain foods and from all sex relations.

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Since our establishment in Laos the province capitals and all the centers where Europeans live have celebrated the National Holiday on July 14 which the natives call Boun-Phi-Falang-Sete (Holiday of the French Genie) or, by onomatopoeia, Boum Ka-Tor-Yu-Yet. [C. A. M. Translator's note. The latter term seems to be an approximation of the French Quatorze juillet ("July 14").]

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MORES AND CUSTOMS

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By reason of their diverse origins and the relations into which they have entered with neighboring peoples, as well as by the cross-breeding which has taken place, the races of Laos necessarily have characteristics, costumes, dwellings and, in a word, mores and customs which differ to a greater or less extent from one race to another (1).

(1) On this question of mores and customs we shall have recourse from time to time to a notice entitled Le Laos français which was written by the Superior Resident in Laos and based on reports and local monographs which were provided by our administrators and are in consequence authoritative.

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If we have consistently reproduced here extracts from the above work, this is because they provide an admirable summation

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Since there is not, so to speak, any class of salaried workers in Laos except in certain types of work and in transport by pirogues and rafts, the inhabitants of any given center lend one another their help in farming, harvesting, building houses or pirogues, etc. Taking turns, the one who has asked help of his neighbors will put on a celebration for them when the work is over, and will himself receive an invitation from someone else in return for help which he has given.

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Laotian celebrations, in which the bonzes are never forgotten, are usually given under the verandas of the pagodas or in their dependencies, unless they take place in the host's own home or under sheds specially constructed for the purpose on one side. The latter is always the case in a "Ngan" given for those who have helped in building a house, and the same is true for a birth or marriage.

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Celebrations generally begin towards four or five in the afternoon when the heat is beginning to wane. They last all night and sometimes resume on the following day after the guests have relaxed for a few hours. Some "Ngans" go on in this way for nearly a week and are interrupted only by the coming of the Laotian sabbath, a day of absolute rest when only the preparation of food is permitted, and no work or pleasure. By the light of kerosene lamps borrowed here and there, or of resinous torches, the girls, who are decked out in all their finery, are stationed in a line squatting down against a wall or partition. Before them there are [221] vases made of copper, silver or porcelain. They all pretend to be busy with minor tasks and may imitate, for example, the preparation of food. But in reality this is only their way of keeping some kind of countenance.

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The adults and children of both sexes are massed at each end of the row of girls. Then the young men, their heads covered with scarves, come and squat down opposite the girls and with their heads still covered begin an animated conversation which soon turns into regular flirting. If there is enough space the orchestra takes up its position nearby and in the center, between the young people, are the singers, improvisers and "Kene" players. Cakes, fruit, quids of betel, cigarettes, rice brandy and various condiments are passed around.

Spectators who have not been specially invited come and stand behind the young people, as do passersby who drop in for a quid, a cigarette, a cup of brandy or a bowl of rice, or to listen to the songs and music for a little while.

231 highly developed canine teeth.

There is another variety, not so tall and lighter in color, which is widespread mainly among the Laotian population on the banks of the Mekong and its tributaries.

[407] Cammon exports pigs to Annam. In 1899, 6,038 of these animals representing a value of 30,565 francs were exported from this province.

Chickens. The Meos have a variety of chicken which is much taller than the chickens of the plains. They make a current practice of caponizing, and this procedure produces chickens which are highly esteemed by Europeans for the firmness of their meat and the delicacy of their taste.

Goats. The raising of goats does not call for any particular remarks. It is done naturally without any particular care, and is localized in northern Laos. In southern Laos goats are found only in the wild state. Europeans have brought in a few domesticated goats for their own use.

231 Sheep. It would be interesting to try sheep raising on the
185 high plateaus of northern Laos. It has been denied that any undertaking of this nature could succeed, but it would seem that no serious attempt has as yet been made. It would first be necessary to choose a breed capable of multiplying on ground similar to that of northern Laos with respect to altitude, climate, forage, hygrometric conditions, constitution of the soil, etc. Since sheep do not withstand humidity well, it would also be necessary to move the flocks to high, dry points during the months of the rainy season. Afterwards, at the beginning of the dry season, they could be returned to pasturages in the plains.

[408] [Blank page]

[409] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER VIII

1. NUMBERS, WEIGHTS, MEASURES AND COINAGE

805 Since numbers, weights, measures and coinage serve as a basis
802 for all transactions and all commercial evaluations, we shall here

805 give a summary of the System in force in Laos.

802 **Numbers.** Laotian numeration is decimal, and goes up into tens of billions (1).

(1) Like all primitive peoples, the Laotians have no conception of such high numbers. Scholars, mandarins and bonzes are the only ones who know these expressions.

[212] [410] Numbers are written, just as we do, in groups of three figures.

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Weights. The initial basis of weight is the "Bak" or "Salung," which is subdivided into three "Fones" or "Fines" and into thirty "Lis."

1 Bak or Salung = 3 Fones or 30 Lis = 0.003753 kilogram
1 Fone or 10 Lis = 0.001251 "
1 Li = 0.0001251 "

The multiples of the "Bak" or "Salung" are:

		kilograms
The Tael	= 10 Baks (10 Salungs) or 30 Fones	= 0.03753
The Sang (or Cattie or Hoi)	= 33 Baks (33 Salungs) or 99 Fones	= 1.23849
The Mune (or 10 Hois)	= 330 Baks (330 Salungs) or 990 Fones	= 12.3849

The multiples of the "Mune" are:

			kilograms
The Sen	= 10 Munes	=	123.849
The Lane	= 10 Sens	= 100 Munes	= 1,238.49
The Kot	= 10 Lanes	= 100 Sens = 1,000 Munes	= 12,384.9
The Tu	= 10 Kots	= 100 Lanes = 1,000 Sens = 10,000 Munes	= 123,849.

[438] [411] The picul (Hap in Laotian) weighs 61.924 kilograms in theory, but it is currently counted at 60 kilograms or else at 60.4 kilograms in trade between Europeans and Chinese.

The sub-multiples of the picul are:

The Mune	= 12.3849	kilograms or 1/5	of a picul
The Sang (or Cattie or Hoi)	= 1.23849	" or 1/50	" " "
The Nane	= 0.619245	" or 1/100	" " "

The multiples of the picul are:

The Sen	= 2 piculs or	10 Munes
The Lane	= 20 piculs or	100 Munes
The Kot	= 200 piculs or	1,000 Munes
The Tu	= 2,000 piculs or	10,000 Munes
The Ha-Song-Khai	= 20,000 piculs or	100,000 Munes

Measures of volume and weight for grain and liquids (1)

(1) These measurements are represented by gourds, halves of coconuts, bamboo tubes or carefully calibrated baskets.

805 [262]

Tamlung-Si-Bate	1/1000 picul or	0.061924	kilogram
Khanane-Lao (daily ration)	1/100 picul or	0.61924	"
Khanane-Khao	1/10 picul or	6.19245	kilograms
Boung-Koite (or Mune)	2/10 picul or	12.3849	"
Bak-Noi	3/10 picul or	18.5873	"
Bak-Niai (one man's load)	4/10 picul or	24.7698	"

[182]

805 436 Coins and measurements of weight for silver

1. Sub-multiples of the Bak (or Salung) 1 Fuang=0.001876 kilogram
2. Multiples of the Bak (or Salung)

1 Bak or 2 Fuangs	=0.003753	"
Tep (Rupee)	or 3 Baks=0.011259	"
Bate (Tical)	or 4 Baks=0.015012	"
Piaster (Mane or Kib)	or 7 Baks=0.026271	"
Tael (Bia)	or 10 Baks=0.03753	"
Barre (Hang or Khane)	or 10 Bias or 100 Baks=0.3753	"

Sang or Cattie (silver pound) or 33 Bias or 330 Baks=1.23849 kilograms

805 [412] Measures of length for cloth, wood, etc.

		meters
1 Niou (finger breadth)	or 1/96 Fathom	=0.01895
1 Kam (closed fist) or 6 Nious	or 1/16 Fathom	=0.11375
1 Kheup (span) or 12 Nious	or 1/8 Fathom	=0.2275
1 Sok (cubit) or 2 Kheups	or 1/4 Fathom	=0.4550
1 Wa or 4 Soks or 8 Kheups	or 1 Fathom	=1.82

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1 Sok Luong (royal cubit)	or 1/4 Royal Fathom	=0.5
1 La Luong (1 Yard and a few centimeters)	or about 1/2 Royal Fathom	=1
1 Wa Luong	or 1 Royal Fathom	=2

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Linear measurements of distance

1 Wa	= 1.82 meters
1 Sen or 20 Was	=36.4 "
1 Yot or 400 Sens or 8,000 Was	=14.56 kilometers

Measures of area. There are no special measures for area. The Laotians are ignorant of geometry and express the dimensions of surfaces by giving the length of each of the sides of the figures which they are representing.

1. The area of a square is expressed by giving the length of one of the sides in linear measurements and saying that all four sides are alike.

2. The area of a rectangle is measured by giving the length of one of the longer sides and the length of one of the shorter sides in linear measurements: so long by so wide.

3. The area of a triangle or that of a polygon is expressed by adding the lengths of each side.

4. For circular plane surfaces, the length of half the circumference is given in linear measurements. This half-circumference is obtained in the following manner: the plane circle or cylinder (a tree trunk, for example) is surrounded with a cord or piece of rattan, then the latter is cut in half and measured.

5. Volumes (cylinders) are expressed by giving the half-circumference [413] and the length or height. Example: so much "Kam Vong" (circumference), and so many "Was" (fathoms) of "Luong-Niaf" (length) or of "Suong" (height).

The system of weights and measures which we have just given is used in the greater part of Laos.

In certain regions a few differences are to be noted. Here are the main ones:

1. Weights

The Houn	= 0.3753 gram
The Tchi-Mu (Salung, 10 Houns)	= 3.753 grams
The Leoung, Hong or Tael (10 Salungs)	= 37.53 "
The Hang (bar of silver, (10 Taels)	= 375.3 "
The Tchoi (44 Taels)	= 1,651.32 "

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2. Second series of weights

The Tep (weight of one Rupee = 3 Salungs) = 11.259 grams
The Bate (weight of one Siamese Tical=4 Salungs) = 15.012 "
The Tamlung-Niai (1) (weight of
4 Ticals =16 Salungs) = 60.048 "

(1) So called in contrast to the "Tamlung Noi" which is equivalent to two and a half Ticals or ten Salungs and which is identified with the Chinese Tael.

The Ha-Hoi (weight of 10 Tamlungs=160 Salungs) = 600.48 "
The Pane, Cattie or Tchang
(weight of 80 Ticals = 320 Salungs)=1,200.96 "

3. Measures of volume

Tchai-Mu (what can be held in the palm of the hand) = about 200 grains of rice.
Kham (a handful) = 4 Tchai-Mus
Pai (what can be held in the open hand, with fingers together) = 4 Khams
Kob (what can be held in both hands) = 4 Pais
Khanane (capacity of a coconut) = 4 Kobs
Bok (tube of bamboo containing about 3.5 kilograms of decorticated rice) = 4 Khananes
Thong-Thang (bushel containing 17.5 kilograms of white rice) = 5 Boks
Thang (double bushel containing 35 kilograms of white rice) =10 Boks
Sen (volume of 350 kilograms of white rice) = 10 Thangs
Lane (volume of 3,500 kilograms of white rice) = 10 Sens

4. Weights used in weighing gold dust in the region of Bassac and in that of Attopeu

1. Met-Khao (weight of a grain of non-decorticated rice) = 0.03754 gram
2. Signe-Nung (Chinese weight, or 48 grains of rice)=1.80192 grams
3. Bak-Nung (weight of 96 grains of rice) =3.60384 "

000 maintain a correct bearing. One should pay careful attention to one's words in order not to hurt those one is speaking to; that could engender an argument, a scandal, or at the very least it might create an atmosphere of embarrassment which is always unpleasant. One should listen to the general conversation and not interrupt the speech of an important person.

A banquet in the European manner.--The director or the president of an association takes care to send out his invitation cards several days in advance of the occasion. The invited guest must answer before the day of the meal to say whether he accepts or declines the invitation. In the latter case he should state the reason for his inability to come.

Politeness requires that one come on time. One should come neither too soon nor too late. If a person does not observe the hour, one often says jokingly that he adopts "mong lao" (the Laotian hour). By "Laotian hour" is understood "one hour later than the one arranged.
/805/ Every guest who arrives at 9:00 P.M. when the dinner is set at 8:00 P.M. goes by the "Laotian hour."

My dear compatriots, in order to be polite, adopt, from now on, the European hour; 8:00 P.M. is 8:00 P. M. and not 9:00 P. M.

He who presides over the banquet is seated in the middle while the most important person invited is placed in front of him. The persons of secondary importance are seated: first, to the right of the President, second, at his left, third, to the right and to the left of
/562/ the outstanding guest and so forth. Laotian women have the habit of keeping apart from the men. At a banquet the group of women sits by itself. From now on we must remedy this custom because the place of the woman should be between two men.

At the table the guests remain standing and do not sit down until their hosts are seated.

Do not wipe your plates and your silver with your napkin. In so doing you would show your hostess that she does not like cleanliness and that she has not given the necessary instructions to her servants to assure the cleanness of the plates and dishes.

Formerly the number thirteen used to be considered unlucky in France: it was necessary to avoid that the number of guests at a banquet should come to 13; one had to arrange it so that one would have a smaller or larger number lest some misfortune might occur to

But that is another story...

The belief in the phi and an excessive credulity results in Laotians being often the victims of charlatans who are severely punished by the Laotian code. Luck-bringing amulets are also very widespread. But this belief in the inhabitants of the invisible world is most apparent in childbirth and in profane ceremonies. 683 757

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

The Calendar

The Laotian calendar belongs to the lunar-solar system. Its elements are borrowed principally from the Indian calendar. As in all the other countries of Indochina the Laotians use the cycle of the 12 animals (Rat, Ox, Tiger, Hare, Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Cock, Dog, Pig). 805

The era most commonly used in Laos is that of Culiasakaraj (little era) beginning in A. D. 638, the next most used is the Buddhasakaraj (Buddhist era beginning in 544 B.C.). Finally the Mahasaharaj (great era) is found in ancient inscriptions. At the present time only the Christian era is used officially.

The months.

The Laotian months are alternately of 20 and 30 days. Sometimes their Indian name is used, but most often their number is used. Their names are as follows:

No.	Laotian	Pali	
1.	deuan Tieng	Magasira	December-January
2.	- Gni	Phussa	January-February
3.	- Sam	Magha	February-March
4.	- Si	Phagguna	March-April
5.	- Ha	Citta	April-May
6.	- Hoc	Visakha	May-June
7.	- Chet	Jettha	June-July
8.	- Pet	Asadha	July-August
9.	- Kao	Savana	August-September
10.	- Sip	Potthapada	September-October
11.	- Sip Et	Assayuja	October-November
12.	- Sip Song	Kattika	November-December

805 [34] The Days.

The Laotian week follows the same order as the French week:

Van Athit	Sunday
Van Tian	Wednesday [sic]
Van Ang Kam	Tuesday
Van Phut	Wednesday
Van Phahat	Friday [sic]
Van Souk	Monday [sic]
Van Sao	Saturday

The Hours.

The day is 24 hours long and is divided into 16 ngam (periods of an hour and a half each).

796 All the Laotian feasts are dated according to this calendar. The Buddhist feasts are listed in a manuscript of the Vat Pra Keo called Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si.

THE BOUN (Sk. punya)

796 788 Every newcomer to Laos will quickly learn to recognize the word boun. Literally this term means "to obtain merits, to give alms," but by extension, it designates the ceremony or feast which accompanies this act. Its meaning has degenerated rather quickly and to "make a boun" means "celebrate a feast."

The religious boun consists essentially in presenting offerings of candles, flowers, etc. to the images of Buddha and gifts to the bonzes after having accomplished the pradakshina or ritual "circumambulation" of the pagoda with lighted candles. This pradakshina is an ancient Brahmanic rite which consists in turning around a funeral pyre or a monument, keeping it always on the right.

Feast of Khao Chi (See below after the feast of the harvest).

796 Makha Bousa (Feast of the third month).

[35] The first religious feast of the Laotian year is that of the "Makha Bousa." It takes place on the fifteenth day of the crescent moon of the third month (end of January to middle of February).

This is the origin:

"Near Vaisali in the country-town of Belouva, a serious illness attacked the Buddha, and he was near death. Then he thought of his

Marriage

In Laos one gets married in the even months. The favorite month is the sixth, that of the feast of rockets, and the last one possible, because in the eighth month the sons-in-law do not dare to interrupt the work in the fields and after that until the twelfth month the Buddhist Lent must be observed. 585 805

[56] **The Marriage Proposal.** Laotian tradition requires a previous request, and the obligatory giving of the Kha Khun Phi, tribute paid to the guardian genii, also the optional gift of the Kha Dong, the dowery which is given by the husband to the bride or to her parents. [782] 584

The boy's mother, accompanied by one or two aged female relatives, goes to the home of the young girl, and in the course of conversing asks if the girl is of age to be married. The mother is free to answer that her daughter is too young or that no young man loves her, and that she runs the risk of remaining an old maid. In this last event the answer is an acceptance. Then during further visits material questions are settled. Up until the day of marriage the two affianced ones do not exchange a single word, and besides it is not necessary for them to know each other. However, as the Laotian villages are not very big, it is probable that the young people have had the opportunity to meet several times at the boun.

The official request takes place the day before the wedding and on the evening of this day, after dinner, the young man goes to the home of his future bride and with her attends the prayer of the bonzes who bless the water contained in begging bowls. A white cotton cord links together the bonzes, the begging bowls and the two betrothed. The blessed water is kept throughout the night. The next day at the earliest hour the same bonzes, the relatives and friends come and sprinkle the two young people generously with this water. When they have dried themselves and changed their clothes, they make their morning offering to the bonzes who bless them once more. 788 584

The Sou Khouan. This is properly called the marriage ceremony. The days and hours for the ceremony are determined by the aged hora (astrologists or soothsayers) after a minute study of the horoscopes of each one. This ceremony takes place in the home of the young girl. After a [57] family Sou Khouan celebrated at his home, the husband returns to his betrothed accompanied by two comrades who protect him with two parasols and followed by a procession of bearers. 585 [787]

301 The use of these magic shirts is also known in Cambodia. The designs
262 usually consist of flowers, geometric figures, tools, flowers, vegetable
751 branches, and of animals. Sometimes pictures drawn from Buddhist iconography can be recognized.

[174] Apparently the origin of tattooing is to be found in totemism. By
301 analyzing the Laotian tattooing designs, [63] it has been possible to recognize traces of sun worship, as well as the mythological role of the dog. But at the present time Laotians seem only to value tattooing as an artistic ornament.

The Divining Rod.

787 Among the curios which the tourist looks for in Laos, the most
823 easily found is a carved bamboo cane. Immediately below the head,
825 which is often of chased silver, there is a sort of checkered diagram made up of twenty-five little squares. Below this divining diagram are found, in succession from top to bottom, a zebu, a horse, a rakshasha or ogre, a tiger, a buffalo, a deer, an elephant. These animals correspond respectively to the days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

It should be noted that, except for the buffalo and the deer, the others are the symbolical animals of the zodiac and correspond to the different cardinal points.

The Laotians consult these figures at different actions of their lives: choice of a wedding day, the hour for burial, etc. The diagram is used to calculate the hour, and the animals indicate the cardinal point which should be followed.

This cane is also found among the Man.

[64] THE NEW YEAR AND THE FEASTS OF THE FIFTH MONTH

527 The Laotian New Year always takes place between the 6th day
805 of the crescent moon of the 5th month and the 5th day of the crescent moon of the 6th month. The very core of the feast includes three days: the last day of the past year, the intermediate day and the New Year's day, properly so-called. The most picturesque ceremonies are those of Luang Prabang, for there tradition has been best preserved.

527 The programme of the feasts begins with a procession of royal elephants. Their heads ornamented with red and black painted designs, their drivers dressed in red tunics with yellow lapels, on their backs, the fifteen elephants go to the pagodas of Xieng Tong, Vat

May, and Vat Visun to render homage to the protecting genii of the village and chase away the evil spirits. 527

During three days the Laotians do no cooking. Fish, turtles, birds, etc., are bought in the big market and then set free as a sign of penitence and redemption of sins committed either voluntarily or not against living beings during the past year. 782

Possibly there is here a survival of the origin of the cycle of animals. According to Finot, at a very remote period, the custom of curing sick children by letting an animal go free had arisen. When a child was saved in this manner, he was said to have been born from this animal because he owed it life. He was forbidden to kill it, and the year of the child's birth was given the same [65] name as the animal. It is thus that the cycle of twelve years was established. 825 771

In the dry beds of the Mekong and of the Nam Khan, small that made of sand are built. Each one wishes the other a long life, whose number of years will equal the number of grains of sand forming the that, and great prosperity, for ill-luck has fled with the last day of the past year, and the New Year should bring as many riches as there are grains of sand in the that. Often around the principal that, other much smaller ones are erected, their number corresponding to the age of the builder. They express the wish of the one who has built them that he will see many more years added to those he has already lived. Actually these little that around the central mound are a reproduction of Mount Merou surrounded by different worlds (Cf. the symbolism of the That Luang). 527 805

In the pagodas the statues of Buddha are taken down from the altars and placed in little wooden prasat. They are sprinkled with perfumed water which flows in the hang-lin (a kind of gutter of gilded wood whose extremities represent the head of an aquatic monster), for the year now ending must be completely exhausted, and a minute cleansing, both material and spiritual, must leave a strictly clear way for the New Year. In the streets the young girls sprinkle not only the bonzes whom they honor, but all the young men, to compensate for all the minor vexations they have endured from the men during the past year. The high dignitaries are not exempt from these showers of more or less clean water. Sometimes their faces are rubbed with lampblack or mud, when they have the ill luck of meeting a group of young girls. Do we have a survival of the theme of the svayamvara here (free choice of the man by the young girl)? [562]

[66] The day in between, the day before New Year's day, is one of complete rest. All the events which occur during this day will determine

527 805 the course of the year for good or for bad. On the day of the New Year, a bassi is offered to His Majesty the King by the ministers and high dignitaries. Then a delegation of bonzes is admitted to the palace where, after receiving the ritual offerings, they are sprinkled in a cabin by His Majesty the King and members of the royal family.

Outside in the town the aspersions continue more than ever during [643] the whole week. During these feasts the King goes in a dugout to the grottoes of Xieng Men, opposite Luang Prabang, and to those of Pak Ou where he sprinkles the statues there. Then he comes to make the ritual aspersion of the Phra Bang, palladium of the kingdom, at the pagoda of Vat May.

527 713 During these feasts of the New Year, the dance of the Phou Gneu Gna Gneu takes place. These are legendary individuals considered the ancestors of the Laotians, whose story is as follows:

When Phou Lan Xong had pierced the gourd, the king of heaven sent his son Khoum Bolom to organize the country. While he was performing the mission entrusted to him by his father, a vine was seen to rise from the earth. It grew rapidly and soon covered the whole world with its shadow. Men ceased to see the sky and were deprived of light and heat. The king ordered this monstrous vine to be cut down, but nobody dared to risk doing this. Finally an aged couple [deux vieux époux] Phou Thao Gneu and Me Ngam, armed with a hatchet and preceding the son of heaven, come down to earth, announced that they were willing to undertake this perilous task. But they stipulated that after their death they would receive offerings and would be invoked at the beginning of meals and other business. Everybody [67] agreed to this. Then they attacked the vine with blows of the hatchet. At the end of three months and three days, the vine fell and crushed them in its fall, but the sun shone again on the world.

The agreement has been kept. Since that day the dance of the Phou Gneu Gna Gneu is one of the principal elements of the Laotian feast of the New Year.

527 825 The two dancers wear enormous cardboard masks. They listen on their knees to prayers read aloud to them, while alongside of them a lion waves its paws nonchalantly. This lion has rather a peculiar role. Apparently it is another survival of the legend of the cycle of animals. Not having any toys to give their children, the first ancestors had the idea of modeling one year a rat, another year an ox, then a tiger, a hare, a dragon, etc. The name of each animal designated the year during which it was used as a toy. Finally these little figures became alive and became the ancestors of the present day species. At